

A Good Conscience Calls Us to Pray

1 Timothy 1:19--2:1

In 1 Timothy 1:19, Paul addresses what he calls a **good conscience**: “*keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith*” (NASB). Now how do you think a person could develop a good conscience such as Paul directs us to in verse 19? If you said by living your life according to the Word of God, you would be right. **Conscience** is something that God includes as standard equipment in every human being, saved or unsaved. Just like the warning light on the dashboard of your car signals you when something is about to go wrong, so your conscience lets you know when you are about to do something wrong, something that is not what God would want you to do.

Romans 2:14-15 NLT:

¹⁴ *Even Gentiles, who do not have God’s written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it.*

¹⁵ *They demonstrate that God’s law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.*

Think about the last time you saw and immediately helped a little old lady, or little old man, or maybe even a teenager cross the street. You followed what your **conscience** told you to do and we bet you probably felt a certain contentment and sense of self-satisfaction which produced a general feeling of well-being. You might say it “*made you feel good all over.*” Now if you were to see that same old man, lady, or teenager and tripped them as they stepped off the curb, you would most likely feel guilty. When you thought about it a few hours later your guilt might be shared with a feeling of shame and perhaps even fear that someone saw you and that you would be charged with assault and battery. As these emotions lingered, you could begin feeling depressed. You should have listened to what your **conscience** was telling you to do, but instead, because you are a rebellious, angry person you take your anger out on everyone you encounter.

Your **conscience** therefore protects you from feeling bad if you listen to it; or it makes you feel bad if you do not listen to it. It is one thing to be able to teach the truth and it is quite another thing to live it. However, if we know the truth and believe it, we will most likely try to live it. There are preachers, however, who might preach a great sermon on Sunday about sexual purity and sneak off during the week to have an affair with their mistress. There are some preachers who tell their congregations about the importance of honesty and yet will not hesitate to take money out of the church account for personal needs. Think of the damage these supposed shepherds of the flock do to the name of Christ and His church when this kind of sin is found out. Think of the damage you might do as well as you relate to others in your day-to-day activities. Listen to Jesus’ words in

Matthew 7:15-20 NLT:

¹⁵ *“Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves.*

¹⁶ *You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?*

¹⁷ *A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit.*

¹⁸ *A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit.*

¹⁹ *So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire.*

²⁰ *Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.*

It is therefore important to be faithful to the Word in the way we live our lives so that we can reflect Christ to those with whom we come in contact. If a pastor teaches the righteous life and lives according to the standards of the world, his teaching about righteousness might not be the true Word of God, and we would have good reason to be uncertain about his teaching. If you tell people about your relationship with Christ and that they should consider knowing Jesus as Savior, and then they hear you during the week cussing a blue streak, or gossiping about their neighbor, they might not want anything to do with the kind of God who would produce such a follower.

1 Timothy 4:16 NLT:

¹⁶ *Keep a close watch on how you live and on your teaching. Stay true to what is right for the sake of your own salvation and the salvation of those who hear you.*

By living in such a manner Timothy will not only “*fight the good fight,*” but also win the battle.

Do you remember what we learned from Jesus earlier about church discipline? In Matthew 18 Jesus gave instructions for handling sin and false teaching in the church.

Matthew 18:15-17 NLT:

¹⁵ *“If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back.*

¹⁶ *But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses.*

¹⁷ *If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.*

1 Corinthians 5:4-5 NLT:

⁴ *in the name of the Lord Jesus. You must call a meeting of the church. I will be present with you in spirit, and so will the power of our Lord Jesus.*

⁵ *Then you must throw this man out and hand him over to Satan so that his sinful nature will be destroyed and he himself will be saved on the day the Lord returns.*

This is what Paul did to two of the false teachers in Ephesus. He is telling Timothy to do the same if the situation calls for it, and he is telling the leaders of the church today to follow this procedure as well. The Greek word in verse 20 translated “learn” means “to learn by discipline.” It is often used of training children.

We would now like to go back to 1 Timothy 1:5-7 (NAS) to begin the conclusion to this chapter.

⁵ *But the goal of our instruction is love from a **pure heart** and a **good conscience** and a **sincere faith**.*

⁶ *For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion,*

⁷ *wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.*

Now in verse 20 Paul tells us that he turned two such people over to Satan: “*Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to **blaspheme**.*”

They were removed from the protection of God's people and put under Satan's control. Paul's purpose in turning them over to Satan was that they may be taught not to **blaspheme**. The purpose of their being put out of the church and turned over to Satan was so that they could be taught not to **blaspheme**. Misrepresenting divine truth from God, as well as speaking evil against Him is **blasphemy**. Even Christians can be guilty of it.¹

Colossians 3:5-11 NLT:

⁵ *So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.*

⁶ *Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming.*

¹ John MacArthur, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary – 1 Timothy*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 46-55.

⁷ *You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world.*

⁸ *But now is the time to **get rid of** anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language.*

⁹ *Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds.*

¹⁰ *Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him.*

¹¹ *In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.*

When believers or unbelievers are delivered to Satan because of blasphemy, God desires that they learn the consequences of such behavior.

Hebrews 12:5-11 NLT:

⁵ *And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, "My child, don't make light of the Lord's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you.*

⁶ *For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child."*

⁷ *As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father?*

⁸ *If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all.*

⁹ *Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and **live forever?***

¹⁰ *For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness.*

¹¹ *No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of **right living** for those who are trained in this way.*

I think Paul would approve if we closed this chapter by saying: "Do the right thing and do the next thing right."

FIRST TIMOTHY CHAPTER TWO

A Call To Prayer

“Late one night a salesman drove into a strange city and tried to get a room in a hotel. The clerk informed him that there was no vacancy. Disappointed, he started to leave the lobby when a dignified gentleman offered to share his room with him. Gratefully the traveler accepted his kindness.

“Just before retiring, the man who had shown such hospitality, knelt and prayed aloud. In his petition he referred to the stranger by name and asked the Lord to bless him. Upon awakening the next morning, he told his guest it was his habit to read the Bible and commune with God at the beginning of each day, and he asked if he would like to join him. The Holy Spirit had been speaking to the heart of this salesman, and when his host tactfully confronted him with the claims of Christ, he gladly received the Savior.

“As the two were ready to part, they exchanged business cards. The new believer was amazed to read, “William Jennings Bryan, Secretary of State.”²

—P. R. Van Gorder

The first chapter of 1 Timothy is largely introductory. We saw that Paul reminds Timothy of a conversation they had when Paul was about to leave Macedonia. Paul had warned Timothy to be on the watch for **false teachers** that would pose a threat to the new church. Paul then goes on to give a brief history of the grace and mercy God showed him by helping him come to a knowledge of the truth about Jesus. Finally in chapter one Paul concludes by challenging Timothy to be the kind of spiritual leader that remains faithful and strives to have a good conscience.

Now as we move into chapter two, Paul begins by describing the importance of praying for all people; asking God to help them, interceding on their behalf, and giving thanks for them.

In a twenty-first century church culture that emphasizes marketing skills, the number of people being added to church membership roles, and the popularity of pastors, the church places far too much emphasis on numbers and pleasing its members. Now there is nothing wrong with such things occurring in the church, but they must not carry a higher priority than prayer, worship, and teaching the pure Word of God exactly as it was written in the Bible. Paul wants to make sure that his **protégé** (prō-tə-zhā),³ Timothy, clearly understands the responsibilities he has been given to care for the people in this church. We believe that the pastor of the church should devote most of his time to these tasks.

² Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.

³ One who is protected or trained or whose career is furthered by a person of experience, prominence, or influence.

“The men who have accomplished most for God have been men of prayer. **John Wesley** was wont to spend at least two hours each day in prayer. Samuel Rutherford rose at three o’clock each morning to wait upon God. **John Fletcher** was said to have stained the walls of his chamber by the breath of his prayers. The greatest missionaries have been uniformly men of prayer.

“Think of **David Brainerd** dying at the age of twenty-nine, and **Henry Martyn** at the age of thirty-one, and yet their names stand out as among the brightest stars in the missionary firmament. These young men exerted a profound influence not only upon their own generation, but upon all succeeding generations as well. It was not by their actual labors, which were soon cut off, so much as by their prayer life and their resultant saintly characters.”⁴

As a pastor, Timothy had responsibilities that went far beyond attending meetings, financial management, and marketing strategies.

Paul ends the second chapter of Timothy with seven verses that have possibly created more controversy in our day and age than anything else in the Bible, and that is his instructions regarding the women in the congregation (in this letter to the church at Ephesus). We hope that when we come to discuss those verses that one of us is not tarred and feathered, especially me. But let us keep in mind here that Scripture quite often needs interpretation by pastors who are able to understand the Bible as a whole work and not just pick out certain verses and draw meaning from the verse alone. We are aware that many of you already know that; but for anyone who may not, we believe you will understand this premise better when we get to 1 Timothy 2:9-15. Now let us read the opening verses of chapter two.

1 Timothy 2:1-8 NAS:

¹ *First of all, then, I urge that **entreaties** and **prayers, petitions** and **thanksgivings**, be made on behalf of **all men**,*

² *for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.*

³ *This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,*
⁴ *who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

⁵ *For **there is one God, and one mediator** also between God and men, the man **Christ Jesus**,*

⁴ Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers.* Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.

⁶ **who gave Himself as a ransom for all**, the testimony given at the proper time.

⁷ For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

⁸ Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, **lifting up holy hands**, without wrath and dissension.

As we read these verses it is possible to create in the mind's eye a scene of what these first church services were meant to be like, according to the instructions Paul delivered, which were of course coming directly from Jesus. **First of all**, all members of the congregation should make it their highest priority to gather together as one body for the Sunday morning service, a Bible study, and prayer meetings.⁵ Just imagine one-hundred percent of the membership of the church showing up for a prayer meeting and/or Bible study. It would be enough to give a pastor a coronary. But come to think of it, we have frequently not even seen the pastors at many prayer meetings in the churches we have visited for prayer meetings. They are probably busy chairing the building committee, or some other department's meeting. As a point of interest the average attendance of the congregation at prayer meetings is around three percent of the total congregation. I cannot remember the source of that study, but I do remember it from something I read in a credible source a few years ago and from personal experience.

Paul makes prayer the first and most important theme of the service or meeting, then he follows prayer closely with worship. So we would understand that to mean that the congregation begins the service with prayer, and we would further suggest that means group prayer involving all members of the congregation.

And how should they pray? **Begin by praying in a more or less general conversation with God**; do not worry about using theological or flowery language. Perhaps some examples here will prove helpful.

“There was a godly man in Germany, named Bengel, who was noted for his intimacy with Christ. A friend desired to watch the saintly man at his devotions. So he concealed himself one night in his room. Bengel sat long at his table, reading his New Testament.

⁵ See also Hebrews 10:23-25.

“The hours passed. At length the clock struck midnight, and the old man spread out his hands and said with great joy, “**Dear Lord Jesus, we are on the same old terms.**” Then closing his book, he was soon in bed and asleep. He had learned the secret of friendship with Christ.”⁶

Then you might continue praying by bringing **entreaties (petitions, requests)** before God. If a member of your church is ill, or perhaps having financial problems, you might want to pray: *Oh God, please let John find that strength within that you have given him to endure this trial, knowing that you will do whatever is best for him;*” and/or “*Lord we ask that you care for Amy in this period of financial hardship and show us what we might do to help.*”

Intercession is something you do for others.

“One Sunday night in April 1912, an American woman was very weary, yet could not sleep because of an oppression of fear. At last she felt a burden of prayer, and with tremendous earnestness began to pray for her husband then in mid-Atlantic, homeward-bound on the *Titanic*. As the hours went by she could get no assurance, and kept on praying in an agony, until about five o'clock in the morning when a great peace possessed her, and she slept.

“Meanwhile her husband, Colonel Gracie, was among the doomed hundreds who were trying frantically to launch the lifeboats from the great ship whose vitals had been torn out by an iceberg. He had given up all hope of being saved himself, and was doing his best to help the women and children. He wished that he could get a last message through to his wife, and cried from his heart, "Good-by, my darling." Then as the ship plunged to her watery grave, he was sucked down in the giant whirlpool. Instinctively he began to swim under water, ice-cold as it was, crying in his heart.

“Suddenly he came to the surface and found himself near an overturned lifeboat. Along with several others he climbed aboard, and was picked up by another lifeboat, about five in the morning, the very time that peace came to his praying wife! Supplication! The prayer that will not take "No" for an answer, that storms the battlements of Heaven, and brings confusion and defeat to all the powers of hell, even death itself!”⁷

Thanksgiving, now what do you suppose that means? Well, that should be a very easy

⁶ Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.

⁷ *Christian Observer*, Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations, WORDsearch.

question to answer. Paul gives Timothy and us a reminder that prayer should always include **praise** and **gratitude** to God.

Dr. David Soper, in “God Is Inescapable,” suggests that basically the difference between a prison and a monastery is just the difference between griping and gratitude. Undoubtedly, this is true. Imprisoned criminals spend every waking moment griping; self-imprisoned saints spend every waking moment offering thanks. Dr. Soper says that when a criminal becomes a saint, a prison may become a monastery; when a saint gives up gratitude, a monastery may become a prison.⁸

“Matthew Henry, the famous scholar, was once accosted by thieves and robbed of his purse. He wrote these words in his diary: ‘Let me be thankful first, because I was never robbed before; second, because, although they took my purse, they did not take my life; third, because, although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.’”⁹

I wish I had the kind of attitude and the faith to think to pray like that. So we see here that Paul recognized the importance of prayer and he placed it right at the top of the list in the life of the church. We should not be surprised therefore to see Paul in verse 1 urging prayer for everyone everywhere. What this boils down to is that each of you should be praying for everyone else in the world including the members of your own church congregation, and they are to be praying for you as well. Then Paul emphasizes this point again a few verses later in 1 Timothy 2:8 (NLT). “*In every place of worship, I want men to pray with holy hands lifted up to God, free from anger and controversy.*”

This theme is emphasized over and over again throughout Scripture, not only by Paul but by other writers as well.

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 NLT:

¹⁷ *Never stop praying.*

¹⁸ **Be thankful in all circumstances,** for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 6:18 NLT:

¹⁸ *Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and **be persistent in your prayers** for all believers everywhere.*

Luke 18:1 NLT:

*One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should **always pray and never give up.***

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

James 5:16 NLT:

¹⁶Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

God wants you to pray for others and He wants others to pray for you. The church body should immerse itself in prayer. Do you meet for prayer with others in the church or even with fellow believers once each week? That's not enough. Do you avoid prayer meetings completely, claiming that praying at home is just as good? That is almost as lame a statement as: *"I do not have to go to church. Nature is my church and I can commune with God just fine on the golf course every Sunday morning."* Maybe you should go back and read the first eight verses of 1 Timothy 2 again because obviously you do not get it. Sure prayer during your quiet time at home a couple of times a day is a wonderful way to deepen a personal relationship to God, but you must also be involved in a community of prayer with fellow believers. There is an extra strength in corporate prayer; that is, when a group of people agree together to pray about something those prayers seem to be especially effective. For instance, in the 1800s there was an evangelist named A.B. Earle who would hold a series of meetings with the purpose of bringing people to Christ. He describes the following incident:

"We were in the midst of an interesting series of meetings in New York. Among those attending from no promising motives was Mr. Olin, a lawyer of marked ability and influence in the town.

"One evening, at the close of the sermon, when an opportunity was given for remarks, Mr. Olin rose, and, in a bold and defiant tone, said:

"Mr. Earle, I have heard you speak repeatedly in these meetings of the "power of prayer," and I don't believe a word of it; but if you want to try a hard case, take me.'

"I said, 'Mr. Olin, if you will come to the front seat, we will pray for you now.'

"He replied, 'I will do nothing of the kind; but if you have "power in prayer," try it on me.'

"Before closing the meeting, I requested all who were willing, to go to their closets at a given hour, and pray earnestly for Mr. Olin; and I requested him to remember at that hour that we were praying for him.

"The second or third evening after this, Mr. Olin rose in our meeting, and urged us to pray for him. I asked him if he would come forward and let us pray with him. He said: 'Yes, anywhere,

if God will only have mercy on so great a sinner.’

“In a few days he was a rejoicing Christian, and soon after sold his law books, and became a preacher of the gospel.”¹⁰

That, folks, is just one example of how God moves when a group of people pray.

In case you are still in doubt about what is being said here, try praying with others and find out for yourself. That may mean, if necessary, getting up off the couch, getting up from in front of the computer, getting away from the kids’ soccer games, taking off your iPod (or whatever its equivalent is today), and getting to the prayer meeting. There is a lot more to be said about the need for Christians in the church to pray and we will continue talking about this essential behavior for all Christians next time.

¹⁰ A. B. Earle, From: "Incidents Used ... In His Meetings," published in 1888, as listed at <http://elbourne.org/sermons/index.mv?illustration+2070>